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# World Englishes (3): Malaysian and Philippine English

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## 1. Introduction

This paper describes the current state of new Englishes in countries of South-East Asia where English is used as a second language, namely, Malaysia and the Philippines. Malaysia is a rapidly developing 'Asian tiger' economy. The Philippines are poorer, but better off in terms of average income than the South Asian countries.

The precolonial languages of Malaysia and the Philippines are in the Austronesian group. These are usually not tonal, have polysyllabic words which may have inflections, compared to English. In Malaysia the precolonial language was Malay, which in its modern standard form has many loanwords from Sanskrit, Arabic and English, and often coins words from Sanskrit roots as English does from Latin or Greek. The various precolonial languages of the Philippines had less influence from other languages. Both languages are now more commonly written in Roman letters. First, the history of both languages is surveyed. Next, the particular salient features such as phonology, syntax, lexis, and pragmatics are compared from a descriptive point of view.

## 2. History

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Malaysia and the Philippines came in contact with India and China. India had to find new places to buy gold because the domestic output did not satisfy the demand so the Indian traders went to Malaysia and the neighboring countries in search of gold. From this point on the Indian civilization heavily influenced the Southeast Asian countries with the introduction of Hinduism and Buddhism. In the 7th and 8th centuries the Buddhist kingdom of Sri Vijay dominated Malaysia and the Philippines. Islam began to spread in the 14th and early 15th century. The Chinese explorer Zheng He came to this region in the early 1400s opening the trade relations with China. This contact brought many Chinese migrants who settled in this region.

Malaysia was controlled by Portugal in 1511, the Dutch in 1641, and the British in 1786. The British brought Chinese and Indian laborers and business people to work on the plantations and mines. Tin, palm oil and rubber were the valuable products that were shipped to Britain and other European countries. The education system helped in the use of English among the educated people who used it in everyday communication.

From 1565 to 1898 the Philippines became Spanish colony. The Catholic missionaries converted many Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim people to Catholicism. In 1898 the Spanish-American war started and the USA took control of the Philippines. The Americans began the promotion of English language based education.

## 3. The current situation: Malaysia and the Philippines

After independence, Bahasa Malaysia became the language of education and administration in Malaysia. However, in 2002 the government decided to use English to teach science and mathematics in primary and secondary schools. The reason for this change was to take advantage of globalization, but in 2009 it went back

to Bahasa Malaysia because of the shortage of teachers who were able to teach in English, and the fear that the students' command of their first language was at risk. English is often used in business and workplace.

The situation was similar in the Philippines where Tagalog, an indigenous language of Manila area was made the national language after independence. English is still the official language of the Philippines. It is widely used in business and administration. The courses in natural science are taught in English. The people prefer the textbooks for calculus, physics, chemistry, biology, and other science courses in English. When it comes to the television, it is said that about 40 percent of the programs are in English. Today, the call center industry in the Philippines functions and prospers because of English proficiency.

## 4. Malaysian English: a descriptive account

Modern Malaysian English seems to vary according to ethnicity as well as education. For some Malays, English is a foreign language used with varying proficiency in work-related situations. For others, educated non-Malays, it is a local lingua franca or even mother tongue, used in a variety of situations with appropriate lectal variation. For others still, less educated non-Malays, it is a lingua franca to be used in basic communication, generally at mesolectal or lower level.

- ★ a reduced set of final consonants and consonant sequences as compared with other varieties and consequently words which end with glottal stops, voiceless fricatives, or nasals ( [i:ʔ] 'eat', [bæŋ] 'bank')
- ★ stereotyped Malaysian vocabulary items: borrowings from Chinese like *kiasu* 'selfish'and local coinages like *blur* 'confused'
- ★ the particle *lah* (borrowed from Chinese) which is used to emphasize confidently made statements or shared knowledge ( *lah* [Particle] a particle emphasizing the word to which it is appended ,e. g.; *orang itu-* ～ *yang pergi*, it was that man who went. Coope (1976) Malay-English/English-Malay Dictionary)
- ★ omission of sentence subjects (and objects) that can be inferred from the context.

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:174 )

### 4.1 Phonology

The phonology of Malaysian English has been characterized by Bautista and Gonzalez (2011) as follows:

1 merger of [i:] and [ɪ]: feel – fill, bead – bid all have [i];
2 merger of [u:] and [ʊ]: pool – pull, Luke – look all have [u];
3 merger of [ɛ] and [æ]: set – sat, man – men all have [ɛ];
4 merger of [ɒ] and [ɔ]：pot – port, cot – caught all have [ɔ]；
5 variant realizations of [ə]：schwa tends to get replaced by a full vowel, the quality of which frequently depends upon orthography；
6 monophthongization of diphthongs：e.g. coat, load with [o], make, steak with [e]；

7 shift in the placement of accents

Schneider (2003/2004:56-7) adds the following phonotactic features for Malaysian English:

8 omission of final voiceless stop or its replacement by a glottal stop in monosyllabic words with a CVC structures;

9 reduction of word-final consonant clusters, usually dropping the alveolar stop;

10 replacement of dental fricatives by stops.

( Bautista and Gonzalez, 2009:133-4 )

Having an accent that is too Chinese is a mark of not being cool in youth culture. The following are the examples of typical Malaysian English.

I one too wee door some money. 'I want to withdraw some money'

Blok lie-tee-fi, lumber tree-too-egg, Ang Suah Load; 'Block 95, No.328, Ang Suah Road'

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:174 )

### 4.2 Syntax

Basilectal and mesolectal Malaysian English differs rather dramatically from the standard in terms of syntax. Subjects and objects can be omitted where they are clear from the context in Malay. For example, the interrogative sentence *' Do you get overtime pay, or can you take time off in lieu?'* has an answer such as *"You want to overtime also can, take off, also can"* ('If you want to take overtime, you can, but if you want to take time off, you can do that too.')

Correspondingly, as in Malay, and many creoles, be as copula can be omitted, like

*'It's pretty quiet running this car park at night, isn't it?, This one ϕ near the shopping centre, night club, there the good business ϕ that ϕ why the government operate the parking here"*('№, it is near the shopping centre and night clubs, there's good business there, that's why the government has a parking lot here.')

Question words other than *why* and *how* are not usually fronted, and inversion is only usual when the verb has BE or CAN auxiliaries, so that the following question forms are normal:

Why you take so many? Go where? She eat what?

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:175 )

This postposition of interrogatives is affected by the Malay language or Bahasa Malaysia. In Malay the interrogative form is indicated either by inflection of a declarative sentence, or by placing the particle *kah* to a word in a declarative sentence. The word that has *kah* attached to it, has the most emphasis. Hence, the interrogative

sentence, 'Is that medicine? may be rendered, either, (a) *Itu ubat?* , (b) *Itukah ubat?* or (c) *Inu ubatkah?* Similarly, the interrogative sentences 'what is that?' and 'What are those?' are rendered: *Itu apa?* or *Apa itu?* It should be noted that the position of a word determines its emphasis. The earlier it occurs, the more emphasis is attached to it.

### 4.3 Lexis

The various lects of Malaysian English include a great deal of local vocabulary.
They are derived from Chinese dialects and English lexical materials.

- ★ *chim/cheem* 'excessively complex/difficult/serious'
- ★ *chope* 'reserve a chair,etc. by putting a bag or garment on it'
- ★ *kiasu* 'person with a fear of losing out to others'

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:175 )

1. Everything also must grab 'He / she has to grab everything.'
2. Must chope seat when you go everywhere 'He/she has to chope a seat on all occasions.'
3. Anything that is free must get 'He/she must get some of anything that is going free.'
4. Must be number 1 in everything ( self-explanatory).

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:176 )

Foreignisms formed from English lexical material are as follows:

- ★ *heaty, cooling,* 'foods regarded in Chinese tradition as yang (male light positive) and yin (female dark negative) respectively'
- ★ *red packet* 'envelope containing money given at a festival'

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:176 )

### 4.4 Pragmatics

One of the most striking features of Malaysian English is its use of pragmatic particles, mainly borrowed from dialects of Chinese. Melchers and Shaw (2011) cites *la(h)* in the following dialogue. The particle *la(h)* 'definiteness' is part of the stereotype.

> Do you use Tamil at all?
> A. I'm afraid [əfrɛ] we know little. Don't [dɔn] speak [spiʔ] at home. To my maid, I have to speak to her. We have learned, lah, since she come.
>
> ( Melchers & Shaw,2011:176 )

## 5. Philippine English: a descriptive account

Philippine English derives from US English, normally uses US spelling conventions and vocabulary variants, and is rhotic. In mesolectal and basilectal accents the / r / is an alveolar flap, not a semivowel. The vowel inventory is reduced in ways typical of 'New Englishes'. Philippine speakers are said to have a ' sing-song intonation' and definite syllable timing.

There is a range of typical Philippine vocabulary: borrowing from Spanish (*merienda* 'afternoon tea'), Tagalog/ Filipino (*kundiman* 'love song'), loan translations from local languages ( since before yet 'for a long time') and local coinages (*batchmate* 'person who studied, did military service, etc. with the speaker'). Since nearly all speakers of Philippine English also speak Filipino, 'mix-mix' code-switching is common in informal and intimate situations.

### 5.1 Phonology

Bautista and Gonzalez (2009) have presented the following phonological features for Philippine English.

1 absence of schwa
2 absence of aspiration of stops in all positions;
3 substitution of [a] for [æ], [ɔ] for [o], [ɪ] for [i], [ɛ] for [e];
4 substitution of [s] for [z], [ʃ] for [ʒ], [t] for [θ], [d] for [ð], [p] for [f], [b] for [v];
5 simplification of consonant cluster in final position;
6 syllable-timed, rather than stress-timed, rhythm;
7 shift in placement of accents.

( Bautista and Gonzalez, 2009:134 )

Acrolectal speakers of Philippine English distinguish most of the vowels Americans do; mesolectal ones merge CLOTH, THOUGHT and GOAT as [ o ], KIT and FLEECE, GOOSE and FOOT. Because Philippine English is largely syllable-timed, unstressed vowels are often given their full spelling pronunciation and indeed vowel reduction is a mark of formal speech and careful acrolectal style rather than the other way round. ( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:178 )

### 5.2 Syntax

Written Standard Philippine English does not vary syntactically from other standard versions, and because its domains of use are more limited than those of Singapore English it has not developed the lectal range and exotic syntax of colloquial Singapore English.

Bautista and Gonzalez (2009) have identified the following characteristics of the grammar, even among highly educated Filipinos.

1 lack of subject-verb agreement, especially in the presence of an intervening prepositional phrase or expression;
2 faulty tense-aspect usage including unusual use of verb forms and tenses, especially use of the past perfect tense for the simple past or present perfect;
3 lack of tense harmony;
4 modals *would* and *could* used for *will* and can;
5 adverbial placed at the end of the clause, not between auxiliary and main verb;
6 non-idiomatic two- or three-word verbs;
7 variable article usage – missing article where an article is required; an article where no article is required;
8 faulty noun subcategorization, including non-pluralization of count nouns and pluralization of mass nouns;
9 lack of agreement between pronoun and antecedent;
10 one of the followed by singular noun.

( Bautista and Gonzalez; 2009:136 )

### 5.3 Lexis

In the Philippines, code-switching between English and the local language is extensively used by urban Filipinos comfortable in both languages. Therefore, it is hard to tell what is simply Tagalog and what is borrowed into English. Nevertheless one can identify local lexicalizations (CRORE words) either coined in English like *bedspacer*' person who is sharing a flat' or borrowed , like *barkada* 'circle of friends'. Among foreignisms borrowed from Tagalog (BONFIRE NIGHT words) are *barong* (shirt) 'traditional smart shirt made from embroidered cloth', *dalagang Filipina* 'traditional "good girl" and *lechon* 'roast pig dish' — as usual foreignisms cluster round food, costume and traditional values. From Spanish (apparently) comes *maja blanca* 'coconut pudding'. The best known foreignism formed from English lexical material is *jeepney* 'taxi' on a jeep chassis. An interesting tautonym (ROBIN words) is *standby* 'idlert, bystander.'

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:179 )

### 5.4 Pragmatics

Code-mixing English and Tagalog is a characteristic way for educated people to vary style. The following extract gives No. 10 of 'ten things I like about the US.'

> Number 10 ko, camping. camping ditto…akala ko,OK.
> Rounding it out daw. Tapos, when my gf and I got to the camp, naka-RV ang mga hinayupak na kano; may barbecue grill pa sa pick-up trucks nila!

( Melchers & Shaw, 2011:180)

## 6. Conclusion

Malaysia and the Philippines possessed a variety of pre-colonial languages with loan words from Sanskrit, Arabic and English. After the independence, both countries made English the medium of education for science courses. English is also used in the government and business. English of both countries are influenced by local vocabulary and code-mixing. Ethnic diversity of both countries has made English an important medium of communication. In future, science, world trade and the Internet will become increasingly important and therefore it is easy to see that Malaysian and Philippine English will stay dominant languages.

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**Abstract :** This paper focuses on the English varieties of Malaysia and the Philippines.
It begins by examining the history and the present situation, and then takes a closer look at the linguistic features such as phonology, syntax, lexis and pragmatics of each variety. English is used in administration, business, communication, and education in both countries after their independence. The linguistic features show the influence of local vocabulary and code-mixing in both varieties of English.